MELANOCORYPHA CALANDRA.

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Calandra Lark.

Alauda calandra, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 288.

——— *sibirica*, Pall. Iter, tom. ii. p. 708 (G. R. Gray).

Melanocorypha calandra, Boie, Isis, 1828, p. 322.

——— *albigularis*, *subcalandra* et *semitorquata*, Brehm, in Naumannia, 1856, p. 374.

It need not be a matter of surprise that the Calandra Lark should have been killed in Great Britain, since it is a very common bird in Portugal, Spain, many parts of Italy, and France, although less abundant in the latter country than in those previously mentioned; further east than Portugal and Spain—in Greece, Turkey, the Crimea, and Palestine—it is, perhaps, equally numerous. Of its occurrence in Britain there are two recorded instances—one by Mr. Gatcombe, who, in the 'Zoologist' for 1863, p. 8768, says:—"A short time since, when looking over the collection of Mr. Pincombe, taxidermist, of Devonport, I recognized a specimen of a Calandra Lark which he assured me had been killed in the neighbourhood, but that he had hitherto considered it to have been a specimen of the Shore-Lark. Now, as the Calandra Lark is said to be common in the south of Europe, I do not see why it should not be occasionally found on our coasts. But notwithstanding this, the above is the first recorded instance of its capture in the British Isles." Respecting the second instance Mr. J. H. Gurney, jun., says, in the 'Zoologist' for 1869, p. 1599, "It may be of interest to know that Mr. Gatcombe has seen another specimen of the Calandra Lark, in the possession of Mr. Byne, which that gentleman obtained from Truscott, the Exeter birdstuffer, who said it was a 'Lapland Bunting,' and killed near Exeter."

The head quarters of the Calandra Lark appear to be Southern and Eastern Europe, and Palestine; it is also numerous in many parts of Northern Africa, yet, curiously enough, seems to be rare in Egypt, if, indeed, it be not altogether absent; for Mr. E. Cavendish Taylor informed Messrs. Sharpe and Dresser that he always found it to be "conspicuous by its absence from the avifauna of Egypt, which is the more remarkable, as it is a common species both in the Pashalic of Tunis and in Syria, Egypt being situated about midway between those two countries."

In the absence of any opportunities for personal observation of this bird, I am compelled to avail myself of the numerous notes which have been published respecting it in my friend Dr. Bree's 'Birds of Europe not observed in the British Isles,' 'The Ibis,' and Messrs. Sharpe and Dresser's work 'The Birds of Europe,' and this I now proceed to do with due acknowledgment.

"Like most of its tribe, except our Skylark," says Dr. Bree, "the Calandra seems to prefer wild and sterile plains to cultivated ground for its residence. In other respects, however, its habits are very similar. Dubois remarks that 'they often fly together in flocks, and have a clear, beautiful, and varied song, which is uttered as often when flying as in repose. Notwithstanding the perfection of their song, it is impossible for amateurs to keep them in their homes, their voice being too loud. When taken young, they may be taught to imitate the voices of all kinds of birds. They often mix together the notes of Thrushes, Finches, Tits, Linnets, Quails, &c., and will even imitate the croaking of the frog.'"

When in Malta, some few years since, I observed it as a caged favourite with the inhabitants of that island, to which, according to Wright, it is "an annual visitor in March and October; and a few may not unfrequently be detected, by their larger size, amongst flocks of Skylarks. It cannot, however, be said to be very common. Numbers are yearly imported from Sicily, and kept as cage-birds for their song, which is too powerful for a room. A good songster is much esteemed, and fetches a good price."

In Algeria, according to Mr. J. H. Gurney, jun., "the Calandra occurs in large flocks up to the middle of March, is very common at Ain-Oussera and Bougzoul, but I never met with any among the Larks in the Algiers market. It is quite unknown in the Mزاب. The underside of the wing is black, which, joined to its large size, renders it conspicuous wherever it is found."

Speaking of the bird in Northern Africa, Mr. Tristram remarks:—"Though swarming on the coasts, and by far the most common Lark in the Tell, the Calandra soon becomes scarce in the interior, and can only doubtfully claim a place in the Sahara list. The two specimens I obtained on its edge are decidedly larger than those of the plains, but do not exhibit any further specific distinction. The Calandra is in high esteem by French epicures, and ranks among the best 'gibier' of the Algerian chasseur."

Respecting the Calandra in Palestine the same writer says:—"In the southern wilderness in winter the flocks of Larks were in amazing numbers, consisting not of one or two, but of eight species. The most

abundant of all was, perhaps, the large Calandra Lark, a partial migrant, and wintering in the desert and southern wilderness, but breeding in the corn-plains and in the north, especially under Hermon."

Mr. Howard Saunders states that the Calandra Lark is "abundant in the great plains south of Seville, where it breeds, making its nest in a depression of the ground, often at the depth of three or four inches. The eggs, though small for the size of the bird, are, however, very distinct from those of *Galerita cristata*. In the Isla Menor, a great place for Bustards, the Calandra is especially abundant."

The Rev. A. C. Smith, in his 'Sketch of the birds of Portugal,' tells us that the "Calandra Lark is common everywhere throughout the open plains and fields, and the most favourite cage-bird among the inhabitants of villages and towns; they may be counted by dozens in a single street, in their cages outside the windows and doors."

Mr. Salvin, in his 'Five months' Birds'-nesting in the Eastern Atlas,' remarks:—"The large size of the Calandra makes it conspicuous among its congeners in places where the other species are found. It seeks the pastures and corn-fields more than *Galerita cristata* and *Calandrella brachydactyla*, though in some places all three are found together in equal abundance. The number of eggs varies from three to five; they are laid about the second week in May, but some earlier."

Lord Lilford writes, "a few of this species are to be observed in summer in Corfu, where they breed. I have never observed this bird on the mainland."

Mr. Robson, of Ortakeuy, informed Messrs. Sharpe and Dresser that "it is common in Turkey in Europe, and in Asia Minor. In the winter they associate in large flocks; and many of them are shot by sportsmen for the table, as they are large plump birds, and in much request for eating. They affect mountains and large plains, but seem to prefer hilly tracts, and are found both on cultivated and uncultivated ground. They stay over the year, and make their nests on the ground." "Mr. Gervase F. Mathew," say the same authors, "has kindly sent us the following:—"The male, on commencing his song, springs from the ground, and with a graceful undulating motion describes a series of large circles, until he rises to an immense height; his song is then clear and beautiful, but at close quarters it is piercing and unpleasant. The call-note is loud and harsh, and somewhat similar to that of *Emberiza miliaria*. At Gibraltar it is frequent; and many are caught on the neutral ground by bird-catchers, who use clap-nets with decoy-birds. A heavy price is asked for a good singer."

Count Mühle says this "is undoubtedly the commonest bird in Greece, and enlivens, even before day-break, the flat country with its song. Its favourite resorts in summer are dried-up swamps and meadows, where cattle graze and, here and there, wild flowers grow. Here it is continually running about after insects, and sings incessantly on clods of earth and heaps of mould thrown out of ditches. When it rises, singing in the air, it never soars so high as *Alauda arvensis*. It nests in open fields, making a carelessly formed nest out of grass straws, which contains four or five eggs. Numbers are caught near Patras and Missolonghi, and sold at Constantinople. They are very obstinate; and when caught old, many will not sing; therefore young birds are preferred." Captain Loche describes its note as "loud and agreeable; and 'sings like a Calandra' means to sing well."

Von Nordmann, in his account of this bird in Demidoff's 'Voyage,' says:—"During the breeding-season the males may be seen pursuing each other with ardour, performing most peculiar aerial evolutions, rising to some distance with a very gentle motion of the wings, spreading and shaking the tail, describing large spirals, and uttering their sonorous and varied song, which is chiefly borrowed from that of other birds."

"The eggs of the Calandra Lark vary considerably in size, and are sometimes as small as those of the Crested Lark. In Dresser's collection are eggs from Spain and from Algeria. The largest is a Spanish specimen, and the smallest an Algerian example. The ground-colour is dull grey with a buff tinge; and the spots, which are closely scattered, are of two kinds—the underlying shell-markings, which are purplish grey and light brown, and the overlying surface-blotches, which are pale umber and nut-brown."

The sexes are very similar in outward appearance, the female merely differing in being slightly smaller and having the black spots on the breast rather less conspicuous.

The figures are about the size of life.

Gould, John. 1873. "Calandra Lark, *Melanocorypha calandra* [Pl. 19]." *The birds of Great Britain* 3, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323910>.

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